

I CHOSE LIBERTY

Autobiographies of
Contemporary
Libertarians

COMPILED BY

WALTER BLOCK

I CHOSE LIBERTY

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF CONTEMPORARY LIBERTARIANS

COMPILED BY
WALTER BLOCK

LvMI
MISES INSTITUTE

© 2010 by the Ludwig von Mises Institute and published under the Creative Commons Attribution License 3.0. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Ludwig von Mises Institute
518 West Magnolia Avenue
Auburn, Alabama 36832
mises.org

ISBN: 978-1-61016-002-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword		ix
1. On My Becoming an Advocate of Free Markets and Limited Government	<i>James C.W. Abiakpor</i>	1
2. My Life as a Libertarian	<i>D.T. Armentano</i>	5
3. My Journey Toward Libertarianism	<i>Charles W. Baird</i>	14
4. A Tourist's Guide to Liberty	<i>Norman Barry</i>	17
5. My Journey to Liberalism	<i>Toby Baxendale</i>	24
6. Malice in Blunderland: The Transformation from Soft-Headedness to Hard Core	<i>James T. Bennett</i>	32
7. Another Path to Libertarianism	<i>Bruce L. Benson</i>	36
8. Murray, the LP, and Me	<i>David Bergland</i>	44
9. On Autobiography	<i>Walter Block</i>	51
10. Where Did I Go Wrong?	<i>Burton S. Blumert</i>	55
11. Reflections on Becoming an Austrian Economist and Libertarian, and Staying One	<i>Peter Boettke</i>	58
12. How I Became an Austrian School Libertarian	<i>Sam Bostaph</i>	66
13. Becoming a Libertarian	<i>Hardy Bouillon</i>	70
14. An Intellectual Autobiography	<i>Bryan Caplan</i>	73
15. How I Became a Liberal	<i>Alejandro Chafuen</i>	82
16. Autobiographical Note	<i>Brooks Colburn</i>	86
17. My Path Toward Libertarianism	<i>Dan Cristian Comanescu</i>	86
18. Libertarian Journey	<i>Roy Cordato</i>	89
19. My Road to Libertarianism	<i>Jim Cox</i>	91
20. A Short Intellectual Autobiography	<i>Tyler Cowen</i>	92
21. How I Became a Liberal	<i>Dora de Ampuero</i>	94
22. A Libertarian from the Womb	<i>Karen De Coster</i>	98
23. Arriving at Libertarianism	<i>Thomas J. DiLorenzo</i>	101
24. My Journey to Liberty	<i>Michael Edelstein</i>	104
25. The Accidental Libertarian	<i>Richard A. Epstein</i>	106
26. Why Did I Become a Free Market Environmentalist?	<i>Max Falque</i>	117
27. Free-Marketeer at the Fed	<i>Robert Formaini</i>	121
28. Studying Under Murray	<i>Douglas E. French</i>	124
29. How I Found Ludwig von Mises	<i>Bettina Bien Greaves</i>	128
30. How I Became a Classical Liberal	<i>James Gwartney</i>	135

31. Embracing Libertarianism	<i>Roy Halliday</i>	138
32. Rothbard and Hayek: A Personal Memory	<i>Ronald Hamowy</i>	141
33. Being Libertarian—I Only Seek the Truth	<i>Ernest Hancock</i>	147
34. The Loneliness of the Long-time Libertarian	<i>John Hasnas</i>	149
35. Why I Am an Economist, a Libertarian, and a Supporter of the Austrian School	<i>Randall G. Holcombe</i>	154
36. Libertarian Thoughts Reborn	<i>John Hospers</i>	158
37. Being a Libertarian	<i>Stephan Kinsella</i>	166
38. What? Libertarian?	<i>Robert Klassen</i>	170
39. How I Became a Libertarian	<i>Dan Klein</i>	171
40. To Be Conceived in Liberty	<i>Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard</i>	175
41. My Path to Libertarianism	<i>Robert Lawson</i>	182
42. A Classical Liberal Life	<i>Leonard P. Liggio</i>	185
43. My Libertarian Life	<i>Roderick T. Long</i>	197
44. A Lasting Encounter	<i>Alvin Lowi, Jr.</i>	200
45. Looking Back and Forward	<i>Spencer Heath MacCallum</i>	205
46. Libertarian in Reverse	<i>Daniel McCarthy</i>	213
47. My Path of Reason	<i>Tibor R. Machan</i>	215
48. A Journey in Libertarianland	<i>Eric Mack</i>	222
49. In the Spirit of Murray Rothbard: Austrian, Libertarian and Thomist	<i>Jude Chua Soo Meng</i>	226
50. An Italian Road to Rothbard	<i>Roberta Adelaide Modugno</i>	229
51. A Judicial Odyssey Toward Freedom	<i>Andrew P. Napolitano</i>	231
52. The Libertarian Idea	<i>Jan Narveson</i>	235
53. Discovering the Libertarian Within	<i>David F. Nolan</i>	237
54. It All Began With Fred Schwarz	<i>Gary North</i>	239
55. A Political Odyssey	<i>James Ostrowski</i>	247
56. Against the Grain in Agricultural Economics	<i>E.C. Pasour, Jr.</i>	251
57. Standing for Something	<i>Ron Paul</i>	258
58. Down on All Fours With Rothbard	<i>Nando Pelusi</i>	267
59. What Liberty Has Meant To Me	<i>Lawrence W. Reed</i>	269
60. A Student of Mises and Rand	<i>George Reisman</i>	275
61. Meeting Murray Rothbard on the Road to Libertarianism	<i>Jeff Riggerbach</i>	286
62. Libertarianism and the Old Right	<i>Llewellyn Rockwell, Jr.</i>	287
63. Arriving at Libertarianism	<i>Mary Ruwart</i>	305
64. It Usually Ends with Murray Rothbard: My Long and Winding Road to Libertarianism and Austrian Economics	<i>Joseph T. Salerno</i>	306
65. Confessions of a Practicing “Socialist”	<i>James V. Schall</i>	315
66. A Libertarian Odyssey	<i>Ken Schoolland</i>	323
67. How I Came to Libertarianism	<i>Chris Matthew Sciabarra</i>	327
68. Burke, Rand, and Rothbard	<i>Larry J. Sechrest</i>	329

69. How I Became Almost a Libertarian	<i>Jeremy Shearmur</i>	333
70. The Reluctant Anarchist	<i>Joseph Sobran</i>	340
71. Seeking and Finding Liberty	<i>Robert Stewart</i>	346
72. Rush, Rand, and Rothbard: A Brief Intellectual Biography	<i>Alexander Tabarrok</i>	348
73. Homegrown Libertarian	<i>Mark Thornton</i>	351
74. From Rebel to Libertarian	<i>Jerome Tuccille</i>	356
75. How I Didn't Become a Libertarian	<i>Gordon Tullock</i>	360
76. It Usually Begins at Home	<i>Frank van Dun</i>	362
77. My Journey to Libertarianville	<i>Marc J. Victor</i>	370
78. Walter Blockized	<i>Peter Walters</i>	372
79. My Intellectual Odyssey	<i>Richard W. Wilcke</i>	374
80. Knowing Myself and Earning Autonomy	<i>Anne Wortham</i>	378
81. How I Became a <i>Christian</i> Libertarian	<i>Steven Yates</i>	386
82. An Austrian Economist by Accident	<i>Fernando Zanello</i>	396
83. Memories of Murray	<i>David Grant</i>	399
Names Index		403
Subject Index		419

Institute. I did so, and in 1998 I participated, for the first time, in the Austrian Scholars Conference at the Institute. There I had the opportunity to meet such people as Jeff Tucker, Ralph Raico, George Reisman, Joseph Salerno, and David Gordon. With the last of these, I began a collaborative work; and in 2001 our *Individualismo metodologico: dalla Scuola austriaca all'anarco-capitalismo* (LUISS Edizioni) was published. Visiting the Ludwig von Mises Institute I deepened my knowledge of libertarianism, acquiring more insight into this new system of thought. I began an Italian translation of some of Rothbard's writings, in order to help publicize his works in Italy. In 2000, with the permission of JoAnn Rothbard and the Ludwig von Mises Institute, I published a collection of Rothbard's articles, entitled *La libertà dei libertari* (Rubbettino Editore). I have also done the Italian translations of *Individualism and the Philosophy of Social Sciences*, published by LUISS Edizioni and of *Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty*, in the Papers of the Italian Acton Institute. ■

Roberta Adelaide Modugno teaches history of political thought at the University of Roma III.

51

JUDGE ANDREW P. NAPOLITANO

A JUDICIAL ODYSSEY TOWARD FREEDOM

WINSTON CHURCHILL, of whose Big Government values I have not been fond, did have a great gift for words. He once famously said, "Any man under thirty who is not a liberal has no heart, and any man over thirty who is not a conservative has no brains."

In my case, things didn't work quite that way. As an undergraduate at Princeton in the late sixties and early seventies and later as a law student at Notre Dame, I was a strong and vocal conservative, as the word was understood at the time. At the height of the anti-Vietnam War movement, I arranged a campus visit to Princeton by William F. Buckley, Jr., the leading conservative intellectual at the time. I brought in other speakers, moderated panels, orchestrated rallies, and made no secret of my political views. I even once wore a T-shirt in 1970 that proclaimed "Bomb Hanoi"! I thought Richard Nixon's militaristic, law-and-order, pro-police platforms in 1968 and 1972 were right for the country.

Fast-forward two decades, however, and you will find me as a judge invalidating police drunk-driving roadblocks in New Jersey and forbidding the cops from stopping someone

on a whim. Before my ruling, the police in New Jersey could and did stop and search any cars they wished. They didn't need any rationale; you didn't even have to be driving erratically since they just stopped cars because they had the power to do so. My published opinion, which ruled that such stops were illegal in the absence of some demonstration of illegal behavior, like weaving in and out of traffic or bolting out of a bar's parking lot, was upheld by the appellate courts. Today in New Jersey random stops by police are illegal, and any evidence acquired during them is supposed to be excluded from trial.

I am proud of that opinion. But it is one that I would have railed against as a conservative college student and law student and active Republican practicing attorney. My younger self would have said, "So what's the problem? If you're not driving under the influence, what does it matter if the police stop and search you? Think of all the drunk drivers those stops will get off the road."

It is a frequently made argument: Why not give up a little personal liberty, like the right to drive your car without being stopped by the police on a whim, in return for temporary safety, like fewer drunks on the road? If the random stops keep one drunk driver off the road and save one child's life, aren't they worth the inconvenience?

Don't be like the younger me. Don't be too quick to agree. Consider first Benjamin Franklin's famous pronouncement: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Ouch!

Is driving a car without being pulled over by the police an "essential liberty?" Will the drunk drivers that such pull-overs find give you a "little temporary safety?" These are not trivial questions. When Franklin made his pronouncement in 1759, he certainly didn't think similar questions of the day were trivial. And that was back when there was no country, no Constitution, and no guarantees of liberty.

The Constitution says the government cannot arrest you without probable cause—specific evidence that you more likely than not committed a specific crime. And our courts have uniformly held that police can't stop you without articulable suspicion—credible reasons that can be stated to a neutral judge as to why your behavior is suspicious of criminal activity. Think about it. If the police can stop you for *any* reason, then they can stop you for the *wrong* reason, like race or appearance or religion or politics or personal vendetta, just as the SS and the KGB did to persons in Nazi Germany and in the Soviet Union.

So why my change in philosophy and outlook? What caused me to flip from being a law-and-order conservative to a true libertarian? The answer: My eight years on the bench.

It took a while, but over time I learned that once the police have pulled you over, they can "find" all kinds of things in your car. And in some cases, if they don't find what they want, they are not above planting it; like a little bag of cocaine placed under the passenger seat by one cop while another has you in the squad car answering questions. Not all cops, of course, do this; but it's a common enough occurrence to be worried about.

Even if the defendant is a drug dealer, with a multi-page rap sheet; even if his harm to the community is palpable and real; even if the police, the prosecutors, and the courts are all convinced beyond a reasonable of a doubt that there was a bag of cocaine somewhere in the car; if the evidence was not obtained in accordance with the Constitution; if the police

did not have a lawful basis for stopping and searching the car; if the police *broke* the law in order to *enforce* it, then the evidence of criminality must be excluded at trial. That is the law today. If the police can mow down the Constitution to nail the Devil, they can mow it down to nail *anyone*. The history of human freedom is paying careful attention to the government's procedures.

I know I've wandered from the main question regarding my profound change of philosophy, heart, and general view of the relationship between individuals and government. I'm not avoiding it, exactly, so much as sneaking up on it gradually.

According to an old joke, "a conservative is a liberal who's been mugged, and a liberal is a conservative who's been arrested"; meaning, of course, that regardless of your beliefs in the abstract, one's personal experiences tend to awaken one to reality, however unpleasant it may be.

Well, that's very much what happened to me. As a judge, I heard the police lie and lie again. I remember one case in which a driver had been pulled over and directed to walk away from the car by one cop, while his partner secretly kicked in the car's tail light. Why? To give the police a legal reason for the pull-over should it come up in court; which it did, of course. I remember another case in which a New Jersey State Trooper testified that he observed a crack in a tail light cover from a distance of six-tenths of a mile!

The first time a judge encounters behavior of this sort on the part of men and women who carry badges and guns and swear to uphold the Constitution ("I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution . . .") and swear to tell the truth (" . . . the whole truth and nothing but the truth . . .") and then do neither, something inside you just dies. To someone from my blue-collar, lower middle class, pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic, respect-for-authority background, it was simply inconceivable.

You tell yourself that maybe it's just one cop. But then it happens again and again. As you gain more experience, you find police not only lying under oath, but using forced confessions and prosecutors unlawfully withholding evidence helpful to a defendant, all in an effort to bring about convictions.

And then a cop I knew well came before me and lied. It was about a cocaine bust. I knew him so well I could tell he was lying to my face under oath when he told me the implausible reason about why he pulled over a known drug dealer and then just happened to observe neatly packaged cocaine on the front seat of this experienced drug dealer's car. My now former-friend knows better than to admit that he lied. He broke the law by lying under oath (why wasn't *he* prosecuted for perjury?), and because of that a guilty defendant walks free; but from the police officer's view, he got the junk off the street (the minor amount of cocaine he seized), and so he and his fellow police officers view this as a "win", even though they broke the law.

For eight years I was a judge of the Superior Court of New Jersey. I have tried over one hundred fifty jury trials: murders, rapes, robberies, drug possession, medical malpractice, antitrust, and personal injury. I have sentenced over one thousand people. I have addressed many thousands of motions, hearings, and divorces. I was a professor of law at Delaware Law School (now Widener Law School) and taught constitutional law and criminal procedure for one and a half years there, and I taught constitutional law and jurisprudence as an adjunct professor at Seton Hall Law School for eleven years. I have written five books on

the Constitution and have given thousands of lectures, broadcasts, and speeches on freedom. I am no longer a sitting judge or law school professor. But what I saw and studied and strained over taught me to speak with authority. I saw the beginnings—in my lifetime—of constitutional chaos.

The effect of my professional intimacy with the system was a sea change in my thinking. I can't point to any single moment of sudden and divine clarity. Instead, the acts of seeing, studying, and examining the events in my courtroom day after day eventually caused me to rethink the verities that had been literally a part of my soul since I matured into a thinking, adult human being.

The one incontrovertible lesson I learned over those hard, disillusioning years: Unless you work for it, sell to it, or receive financial assistance from it, *the government is not your friend.*

The practical realizations that the government lies, cheats, and steals, and the unpleasantness attendant upon the acceptance of that while sitting as a life-tenured judge, naturally brought about a thirst for an intellectual re-examination of my own beliefs on the origins of freedom and to take a second look at the schools of thought that have animated the titanic battles between liberty and tyranny.

As an undergraduate during a radical time period on American college campuses, 1968 to 1972, I studied under brilliant minds, but those with a decidedly Big Government and Progressive bent. At Princeton, I was always going against the grain. The grain in those days was anti-government, anti-war, anti-big business. Having come to the understanding in the 1990s that I had been on the wrong side of human freedom in the 1970s, I was determined to re-examine the intellectual sources that brought me there.

So, I re-read many of the great books that had influenced my youth, and I read for the first time some that I had missed. I re-read *The Conscience of a Conservative* by Barry Goldwater and I re-read *Orthodoxy* by G.K. Chesterton. I dove into John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Augustine. I re-read *Capitalism and Freedom* by Milton Friedman. I read essays and articles by Murray Rothbard, Ludwig von Mises, and Ayn Rand. Perhaps the book that was the capstone of reforming my approach to liberty and tyranny was F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. I have read this masterpiece twice. I was also profoundly influenced by two other masterpieces, *The Way*, by St. Josemaria Escriva, and *A Man for All Seasons*, by Robert Bolt. I re-read the three hundred most important cases decided by the United States Supreme Court; a daunting and frustrating task. I also re-read *The Just War* by Paul Ramsey, a Protestant theologian who was more faithful to the Magisterium than most Catholic priests were in the 1970s, and who taught me just war theory at Princeton. I even read James Madison's notes and other records from the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Then I found a place that synthesized all this so nicely—LewRockwell.com, or LRC as it is known to its fans. LRC is the most important, courageous, intellectually consistent web site in the world for those who are pro-free market, pro-natural rights, anti-state, and anti-war. It provides daily intellectual, and often humorous, sustenance to those of us who believe in the primacy of the individual, and those who truly believe that the state exists for the sole purpose of defending individual freedom.

I thank God for my intellectual odyssey. I have happily arrived at the most comfortable place for all who believe in human dignity; a place prepared by God the Father out of His love for us; a place for which I would sacrifice my life rather than live as a slave; a place which is the natural residence for all human aspirations. A place called freedom. ■

Andrew P. Napolitano is a former judge of the Superior Court of New Jersey, senior judicial analyst for the Fox News Channel, and hosts the daily Fox News program, *Freedom Watch*.

52

JAN NARVESON

THE LIBERTARIAN IDEA

MY WINDING UP IN SOMETHING of a libertarian camp was not from reading Ayn Rand. If anything, it was from having been brought up in a tiny town (in Minnesota) where everyone worked for a living, having some experience in farm and factory as a teenager, and, mostly, from my professional reading down through the years, and trying to figure things out. Especially moral and political things, interest in which may have stemmed from a Lutheran upbringing in a family that took that very seriously—and having become decidedly unserious about Lutheranism in the event.

I went to the University of Chicago as an undergraduate, back in the 50s, and there of course most of the students were flaming radicals or else utterly apolitical. I first did the University of Chicago's famous liberal education curriculum, in which we read people like Plato and Aristotle and many of the other famous philosophers of former times. I then did a year in political science, which I found not very interesting, and then in my final year moved into philosophy, which was really my first love, and have been there ever since.

While a graduate student (at Harvard), my interest in the Utilitarians solidified, and for my thesis work I immersed myself in the very difficult problem of how to reconcile Mill's very libertarian essay *On Liberty*, a very attractive and convincing work, with his likewise famous *Utilitarianism*. The latter argues that the fundamental criterion of morals is the maximization of general happiness or utility. But the former argues that we all have a basic right to be free so long as we do not, in our pursuits, harm others. This last sounded very persuasive to me, on reflection, but so did Mill's utilitarianism. The trouble is, it is really not obvious that one can always maximize general utility by respecting someone's

Autobiographies are important. Our movement consists of more than merely the ideas of Austrianism and libertarianism, no matter how important those undoubtedly are. It is comprised of people, real flesh and blood creatures who extend beyond, far beyond, the thoughts they hold at any given time. The proportion of words written by us, about our ideals and about ourselves, is, overwhelmingly in favor of the former. The present compilation of autobiographies will, in some small way, tend to right this imbalance.

Ludwig von Mises Institute
518 West Magnolia Avenue
Auburn, Alabama 36832
Mises.org

ISBN 978-1-61016-002-5



SKU55550